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VALEDICTORY ADDRESS

DELIVERED TO THE GRADUATING CLASS,
31st MARCH, 1882.

BY

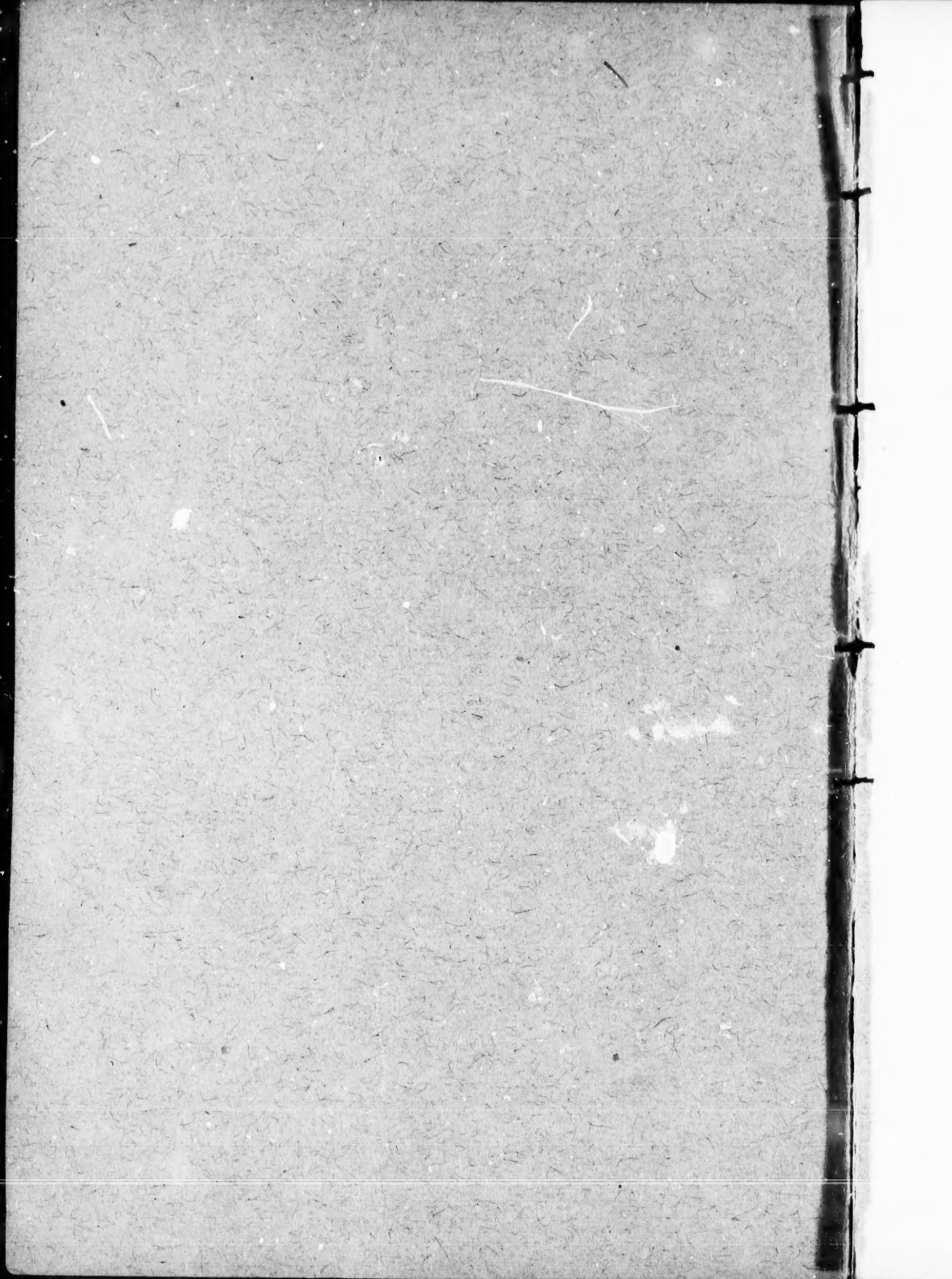
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*Professor of Midwifery and Diseases of Women and Children,
McGill University.*

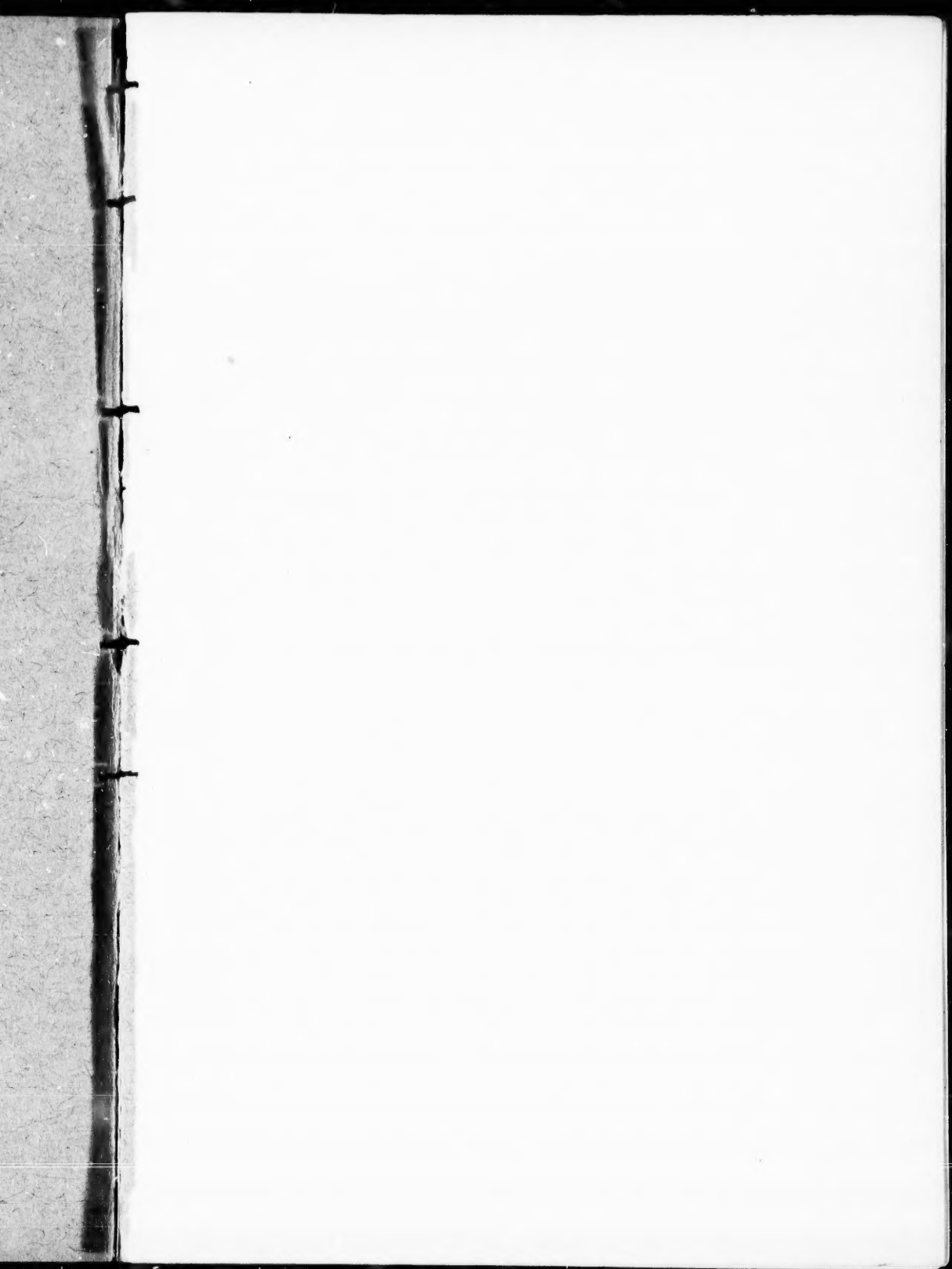
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By D. C. MacCALLUM, M.D., M.R.C.S., ENG.

Professor of Midwifery and Diseases of Women and Children, McGill
University.

Gentlemen, Graduates in Medicine,—There occur periods in the lives of most men, when, having reached a certain point in their career, having accomplished a definite purpose, it is wise and salutary to take a retrospective glance over the work done and the causes which have led to ultimate success; and, further, to consider seriously the impending future with all its urgent demands, its grave responsibilities, and its varied possibilities. To each one of you this day is such a period. When you look back to the commencement of the four years or more which you have devoted to the study of medicine, you will readily recall the feeling almost of dismay with which you regarded the extensive curriculum of study presented to you. For medicine, in common with other sciences, has made wonderful progress in late years, and the difficulties of acquiring a thorough knowledge of it are rapidly increasing. Indeed it has become a serious question with thoughtful and observant members of the profession, more particularly with those engaged in teaching, whether the demands made on the student are not too onerous for the limited

time allotted to him to fulfil them. It would really appear either that there should be a more restricted curriculum than the present one, or a longer time insisted on to master the subjects included in it. That you should, in the short space of four years, have fulfilled the demands made on you, and have acquired such an amount of professional knowledge as to have enabled you to pass successfully the rigid examinations to which you have been subjected, is in the highest degree creditable to you, and is an earnest that you are not wanting in those qualities which go far to ensure success in life. Your experience during these years will have impressed upon you the important truth that success is not due to a happy combination of fortuitous circumstances, but that it is the result of determined, persevering effort. Genius not infrequently attains its ends with apparently slight effort, but, as a general rule, that inborn aptitude to master certain departments of knowledge which is called *genius*, if not associated with a willingness to work, rarely accomplishes much. A man of average brain power, who pursues his object with singleness of purpose and with unflagging industry, will do more in the way of acquiring knowledge, and of adding to the sum of that already existing, than one more highly gifted by nature, but who is lacking in energy and perseverance. It is not the mere possession of talent that enables a man to secure a prominent position amongst his fellows. If he attain a front rank, it will be due mainly to his capacity for work. And the work, too, must be regulated, continuous, and directed towards a definite end. For labor is too often wasted when it is expended on a diversity of objects having no relation to each other, and not one of which is made the great aim of the worker's life. Another truth which you will have learned is, that mental labor is not altogether a task, but that in the pursuit of knowledge there is a pleasure which amply repays all the labor bestowed upon it. Although at times irksome, and attended by frequent discouragements, it affords the highest gratification to the noblest part of man's nature. In the cultivation of his intellect, in the storing of his mind with important truths, and in the effort to perfect himself in some honorable calling in life, man finds some of his

highest and purest enjoyments. Apart from any consideration of the material advantages which may attach to a thorough professional education, or the fame and honor which may be the outcome of successful scientific investigation, there is in the acquirement of the one or the prosecution of the other that which eminently satisfies the thirst for knowledge, which is a leading characteristic of the mind of man. But with the satisfaction derived from present success, there is always associated a feeling that comparatively little has been accomplished, and this becomes a powerful incentive to further effort. And yet, as the eve approaches of a life honestly and devotedly spent in the cultivation of science, the most enthusiastic votary feels like Sir Isaac Newton, as if he had gathered a few of the pebbles only from the shores of the knowable, while the vast ocean itself stretches out before him unexplored. "I live joyless in my eighty-ninth year," writes the great Humboldt to his friend Varnhagen, "because of the much for which I have striven from my youth so little has been accomplished." So it is, and so it always will be. Despite his loftiest attainments, man always feels an intellectual want that must be satisfied, an intellectual void that must be filled. And, what is most singular, the more varied and profound his knowledge—the deeper he may have penetrated the arcana of Nature—the richer and more glorious the truths he may have brought thence, the more weak and ignorant does he appear to his own scrutinizing introspection. The general public, conscious of the vast distance that intervenes between their own acquirements and his, speak wonderingly of his great intellect and accumulated stores of learning. Whilst he, the scholar and wise man, according to the testimony of all, in view of the higher and still higher heights of truth remaining to be scaled, and whose outlines are appreciable to his exalted sense alone,—in view of the ever-widening and ever lengthening vista that opens up before him as he pursues his travels into regions of thought and territories of investigation never before penetrated,—bewails his own littleness, his want of energy and mental vigor: for knowledge, as a rule, certainly has the effect of making its most favored votaries the humblest and least self-con-

ceited of men. He regards the three-score years and ten allotted to man in this state of existence a mere fleeting point of time—all too short a period in which to grasp even a tithe of what presents itself for investigation,—and he therefore looks hopefully forward to an infinite future, where his soul may bathe without check or limit in the pure untroubled waters of truth.

That knowledge sometimes “puffeth up” its possessor is as true now as in the days of Saul of Tarsus, and probably more generally true now than at that time. If the *dictum* of that great and gifted mind were more generally known and received at the present day, and the conduct of men influenced by it, there would be fewer exhibitions of those pretentious and obtrusive claims of individuals to be regarded as burning and shining lights of science,—the ranks of scientists, as they call themselves, would be greatly thinned, and, I fear, that a goodly sized volume containing sketches more or less brief of the learned and distinguished men of this Dominion would shrink to one of very modest proportions. The *dictum* of St. Paul is: “If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.” Lay this, then, to heart; and whilst it need not prevent you from indulging a feeling of proper pride in accomplished work and its favorable reception by your fellows, it will save you from overweening vanity and a constant and restless craving for notoriety.

Your success in obtaining the degree of Doctor in Medicine and Master of Surgery of this University we may consider then as being due mainly to three causes,—*Capacity for work, Love of work, and Will to work*; the last being by far the most important. The professors in this Faculty, while rejoicing sincerely in your well-merited success, take no other credit in the result than simply that of having endeavored, as far as in them lay, to give proper direction to your studies and to strengthen and develop in you these all potent powers. And you have, therefore, the proud satisfaction of knowing that the honorable position in which you stand before your friends to-day is one which, in an important sense, you may be said to have attained *for yourselves—by yourselves*. Provided with the diploma which has

just been placed in your hands, and with the power to claim all the privileges which it confers, you have now, especially, to enter into the struggles and contentions of life, and prove what there is of mettle in you. We would not that any one of you should prove a failure, and were it in our power to make you able and respected practitioners of medicine, good and upright men, loyal and patriotic citizens, willingly would we exert that power in your favor. But in this, also, we can only advise: we can only erect for your guidance a few finger-posts pointing the way of duty and responsibility. The power of making or of marring your own fortunes lies entirely with yourselves.

The great object of your life henceforth must be the prevention, alleviation, and cure of disease. And when you reflect that this involves the comfort and happiness of your fellowmen and the saving of human life,—preserving the bread-winner to those dependent upon him, the mother to the love and devotion of husband and children, the children to the yearning affection of parents,—you cannot but be strongly, even painfully, impressed with the magnitude of the responsibilities which will devolve upon you. Seek not in any way to weaken this impression, but let it have its full influence as an incentive to unremitting attention to duty. The way of duty in the profession of medicine is not always smooth and pleasant, but frequently rugged and wearisome. It can only be successfully followed by the exercise of patience, self-denial, energy and perseverance—qualities which you should carefully cultivate, for he only who possesses them is fitted to surmount difficulties or to shape events so as to favor the end he may have in view. At one time, cheered by success and the heartfelt gratitude of those whom you may have been the means of raising from a bed of suffering and disease, you will experience that sense of satisfaction, often amounting to exultation, which is felt by those who have accomplished a great and beneficent work, and you will rightly conclude that the ways of medicine are *sometimes* the ways of pleasantness. At another time, depressed and dispirited by failure in your efforts to save life, or by unmerited slight and the withdrawal of confidence by those who ought to consider themselves under obligations to

you, you will again rightly conclude that the ways of medicine are *not always* the ways of pleasantness. But whatever your triumphs or your reverses, you must be equal to the former and rise superior to the latter. Undue elation and undue depression are equally proofs of weakness. The strong, self-reliant man, conscious of the integrity of his motives and his actions, courageously accepts whatever verdict may be passed upon them, and finds in the approval of his own conscience that which will sustain him under the most trying circumstances. So long as he feels confident that the end he has in view is laudable and good, he steadily pursues his course, feeling certain that the right thought and the right deed must ultimately prevail. The weak, shrinking man, on the other hand, has too often scant faith in his own judgment and convictions. Haunted by a constant dread of the adverse opinions of his fellows, he pursues a vacillating, hesitating course, and as the world smiles or frowns, so is he supremely happy or miserably wretched. But while *self-reliance* is always to be commended, as much cannot be said of *self-confidence*. The most disastrous events occurring in daily life are commonly the result of some serious blunder committed by a capable but too confident man. A serious blunder in the practice of medicine would be something akin to a crime. No matter then how thorough you may consider your knowledge, always act with an ever present conviction that it is quite possible to make a mistake. A certain amount of skepticism as to your own infallibility will prove one of the best safeguards against careless or precipitate action.

Although you are fully fitted by the course of studies which you have just completed to enter upon your life-work and assume its responsibilities, if you desire to excel you must exhibit the same capacity for, the same love of, and the same will to work that have so far crowned your efforts with success. The marked impetus which has of late years been given to experimental inquiry in all departments of medicine still continues. The restless, questioning spirit of the age has seized the master minds of the profession, and, as a consequence, great and important additions are constantly being made to our

knowledge of the pathology, symptoms and treatment of disease. So numerous and active are the workers and so wide-spread their investigations, that you will find it no easy matter, even while using due diligence, to keep yourselves abreast with the results of their labors. This will be especially the case when your practice has become so extensive as to demand most of your time and attention. It is, therefore, of the highest importance, while you have the leisure, that you should lay broader and deeper the foundations of your knowledge by a careful study of the works of the classical authors in medicine, and build up and complete the superstructure as much as possible by additions from the works of the men of to-day. It is not to be expected, however, that professional studies should occupy your time to the exclusion of all efforts to increase and advance your culture in other ways. Medicine must certainly have the first place, and dominate over all other aims or objects, but at least a certain portion of your time must be employed in improving your mind in other directions. What you have to guard against is, that no other pursuit shall engage your attention to the neglect of professional studies. For, as Milton has well expressed it:—

“Not to know at large of things remote
From use, obscure and subtle, but to know
That which before us lies in daily life,
Is the prime wisdom! what is more, is fume
Or emptiness, or fond impertinence,
And renders us in things that most concern
Unpractised, unprepared, and still to learn.”

In all the relations of life be upright, honest and true. Never deviate from the line of rectitude and honor. To your patients be ever the earnest, attentive physician, willing to submit to any inconvenience, and to sacrifice time and leisure if the necessities of their case demand it. Act singly for their good and without the least consideration for self. Patients will not be slow in recognizing this, and they will give you credit for earnestness of purpose and feel grateful to you for your attentions. Their confidence in you will be strengthened, and when death invades and snatches away some loved member from their family

circle, they will feel satisfied that all that devotion and skill could possibly do has been done to save the precious life.

To fellow-members of the profession be always considerate and generous—prompt to defend their professional reputation when thoughtlessly or maliciously assailed. Any attempt to improve your own position by detraction of a *confrère* would not only be unmanly and unprofessional, but would probably and justly fail. Always take a deep interest in the welfare of your country. Cultivate in yourselves and take every favorable opportunity to kindle in others a spirit of patriotism. Canada is a country of which her sons may well be proud. A not unimportant part of the greatest and most liberal empire the world has ever seen, with self-government secured to her, and with no old world class distinctions among her people, she is at present the freest, the happiest and the most secure place on the surface of the globe in which to dwell. Grateful, indeed, ought every Canadian to be for all that Britain, the grand old mother country, has done for this Dominion, and steadfastly should they resist any attempt to weaken the bonds which now unite the two. In no part of the empire does there exist a deeper feeling of loyalty and devotion to our Empress Queen than in this Dominion of Canada. When the tidings reached us of the late attempt upon her life, we, her loyal subjects in Canada, could scarcely realize its possibility. That there could exist a brain to conceive and a hand to carry out a murderous design against one whom the civilized world acknowledges to be peerless as a sovereign, peerless as a mother, and peerless as a woman, was beyond our comprehension, and it was with a feeling of relief that we learned that the brain and hand were those of one who cannot be held accountable for his actions. Thankful, fervently and profoundly thankful, are we for Her Majesty's providential escape, and that a national calamity has been thus averted. We hold her in reverence as the supreme head of the state, we honor her as the wise and constitutional ruler, but we love her for those qualities of heart which have made her, in good old expressive Saxon, the *sweet-heart* of her people. God save the Queen.

In conclusion, gentlemen, with a full and abiding sense of the responsibilities which now devolve upon you—with a firm determination to do your duty faithfully and honorably and to merit the affection and esteem of your fellow-men—with a high resolve to conquer a prominent position, or at least not to prove laggards in your profession—with feelings of charity and kind commiseration for the lowly and distressed, and with hearts overflowing with tender sympathy for all who suffer sorrow, pain or disease—go forth from this hall, and enter hopefully and cheerfully upon the work of your life, and may the blessing of Heaven rest upon your labors. Fare-ye-well.